

Slug: Ask the Master Gardener  
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Contact: WSU/Skagit County Extension: 428-4270

## **Cabbage - By Ann Cox**

### **HEAD:**

Cabbage care and feeding

### **DEK:**

A little nurturing delivers sweet results

### **BODY:**

Cabbage is a member of the Brassica family, also known as a cole crop. Cabbages are easy to grow and can be raised almost year-round. Many gardeners think homegrown cabbage tastes sweeter than those found in the grocery store (you be the judge), and delight in serving it up in a variety of forms. You can boil it—as in corned beef and cabbage, make coleslaw or sauerkraut, add it to soups or stews, or punch up a stir fry recipe.

Early maturing cabbage should be planted from March through June. Sow fall maturing types from late May to early June. Seeds should be one-fourth to one-half inch deep and about five seeds per foot; when the plants are a few inches tall, thin them to 18 to 24 inches apart in rows 2 to 4 feet apart. For optimal growth, work about two cups of complete fertilizer into the soil around each plant and give your plants one to one and a half inches of water per week.

Cabbages can be bothered by several different pests. Aphids can be controlled with insecticidal soap, hot pepper wax or a hard spray of water. For cabbage worms, loopers and root maggots, use BT (*Bacillus thuringiensis*). Another effective and safe way to protect your cabbages is with a floating row cover or insect barrier. These can also help with flea beetles. Crop rotation also helps give you a healthy crop by preventing soil-borne pathogens from getting a toehold.

Early maturing cabbages, such as 'Parel' or 'Derby Day,' grow rapidly and will burst quickly so they should be picked promptly. When harvesting your cabbage, leave two or three "wrapper leaves" around the cabbage as you cut off the heads. Overripe heads have a tendency to crack open.

Autumn cabbages, such as 'Late Flat Dutch' or 'Stonehead,' can stay in the ground a lot longer—often for several months—because their growth rate is much slower and also because their larger wrapper leaves help protect them from frost. As with any crop, practicing good clean-up helps to guarantee a better, healthier crop.

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This column is written by Washington State University/Skagit County certified Master Gardeners. Questions may be submitted to WSU/Skagit County Extension, 306 S. First Street, Mount Vernon, WA 98273-3805.